GT Road Disaster

At Peshawar Airbase, around more then two hundred miles away from Lahore, six F-86s of No 19 Squadron were ready to be airborne, armed with guns and rockets since September 5th as per specific instructions of Air Marshal Nur Khan. As soon as, a call was received from Air Headquarters of launching the first air strike by the No 19 Squadron under the command of Squadron Leader Sajjad Haider , the Sabres took off.

Sajjad recalls “Though the sun was up in the morning of 6th September, the air was still bracingly cool at our airbase. The news of Indian military attacks against Lahore came as a thunderbolt to all of us and it worked up the fighter pilots into a vicious mood. Everyone was urged to go forward to safeguard his nation and country".

As we were ordered to launch air strike mission on the Indian Armour units advancing to wards Lahore along the Amritsar-Wagah GT Road, a jubilant mood prevailed among pilots for the first mission in the morning. Those who joined me on the mission were Flt Lt Arshad Sami, Mohammad Akbar, Khalid Latif, Dilawar Hussain and Ghani Akbar.”

“Our F-86s were armed with rockets in addition to the six guns. We took off and leveled off at the pre-planned height before heading towards, Wagah, Lahore.Shortly afterward we were over the target area and went in as far as Amritsar. Turning back we spotted enemy vehicles of all sorts moving along the road crossing Wagah border, covered by the Sherman tanks. I also saw the now famous Omni Bus parked at the Wagah Custom Post which the Indian Army later paraded that day in the streets of Amritsar as the war trophy from Lahore. For a while the enemy did not see us orbiting overhead. But when they did it was a sight

to see the soldiers and drivers jumping out to take cover leaving vehicles to fate."

" All pilots check your firing switches; hot; target in sight."

As the second dragged on the Haider formation reached the pull up point and the six F-86s climbed steeply into the sky like darts getting ready for attack.

"I had by now dived in for attack and let go my first burst of rockets. My formation followed. I all we made six attacks each, as our formation orbited over the targets at tree top level. By the time we had expended our guns and rockets and returning to our Airbase. We saw a litter of bonfires destroying dozens of Sherman tanks, cannons and army vehicles. "

It was an armour brigade task force group trying to cross the BRB Canal at Batapur bridge. The war diary of 10 Division defending Lahore led by Major General Sarfaraz Khan , recorded that " at this crucial juncture appeared 6 PAF s' F-86s and for 15-20 minutes wrought havac on enemy armour and infantry, who were advancing in the open road trying to cross the BRB canal.

Dawn of 6th September, 1965 saw a formation of 6 F-86s of No 19 Squadron fully loaded with 5 inch rockets (a last minute premonition the night before, by Air Marshal Nur Khan the C-in-C, which paid rich dividends) flying on "Hot Patrol'. The moment the Air Defence Commander learnt of Indian Army's advance towards Lahore, the 19 Squadron formation was diverted to stop the advancing Indian armour columns at Wagah. In twenty minutes of action, the Grand Trunk Road was littered with scores of burning tanks, armoured and soft vehicles. The 5 inch rockets had a devastating effect on the enemy armour. The formation led by Squadron Leader Sajad Haider with Flight Lieutenants M Akbar, Dilawar

Hussain, Ghani Akbar and Flying Officers Khalid Latif, and Arshad Chaudhry brought the Indian attack to a dead halt.

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